TWITTER REFUSES US ORDER TO REVEAL USER BEHIND ANTI-TRUMP ACCOUNT

SAN FRANCISCO: Twitter Inc on Thursday filed a federal lawsuit to block an order by the US government demanding that it reveal who is behind an account opposed to President Donald Trump's tough immigration policies. Twitter cited freedom of speech as a basis for not turning over records about the account, @ALT_uscis. The account is claimed to be the work of at least one federal immigration employee, according to the lawsuit filed in San Francisco federal court.

The acronym US CIS refers to US Citizenship and Immigration Services, and the account describes itself as "immigration resistance." Trump has vowed to build a wall along the US border with Mexico and has promised to deport millions of illegal immigrants. Following Trump's inauguration in January, anonymous Twitter feeds that borrowed the names and logos of more than a dozen US government agencies appeared to challenge the president's views on climate change and other issues. They called themselves "alt" accounts.

Twitter spokesman Nick Pacilio declined to comment on whether the government had demanded information about other accounts critical of Trump. Twitter, which counts Trump among its active users, has a record of litigating in favor of user privacy. "The rights of free speech afforded Twitter's users and Twitter itself under the First Amendment of the US Constitution include a right to disseminate such anonymous or pseudonymous political speech," Twitter said in the lawsuit. The Department of Homeland Security, which is a defendant in the lawsuit, declined to comment on pending litigation.

The Justice Department, which typically represents federal agencies in court, and the White House had no immediate comment. Senator Ron Wyden, an Oregon Democrat, said in a statement it was a waste of resources to try to uncover an anonymous critic, and he called on the Homeland Security inspector general to investigate who directed the "witch hunt." Esha Bhandari, a staff attorney with the American Civil Liberties Union, which is representing the Twitter user, said the government's request was highly unusual.

Requests for social media account information from the US government typically involve national security or criminal charges, she said. "We have seen no reason the government has given for seeking to unmask this speaker's identity," Bhandari said, adding that the right to anonymous speech against the government is "a bedrock American value" strongly protected under the First Amendment of the US Constitution.

'Right-wing idiots'

Shortly after the lawsuit became public, @ALT_uscis tweeted a copy of the First Amendment and a picture of part of the lawsuit. The account's followers nearly tripled to 89,000 in the hours after the news broke. For weeks the account has posted criticism of the administration. It tweeted a parody of the game "bingo" for "right-wing idiots," said that some anti-immigration advocates must have been dropped on their head at birth, and mocked Trump for not giving more of his wealth to charities.

Twitter said it received an administrative summons last month demanding that it provide records related to the account. A copy of the summons filed with the lawsuit says the records are needed for an investigation to ensure compliance with duties, taxes and fines and other customs and immigration matters. It was not immediately clear how the anonymous account fit into those laws and regulations, and Twitter said the summons was an abuse of a law meant to be used to investigate imported merchandise.

Twitter might have a strong case that the summons was improper, said Paul Alan Levy, staff attorney at Public Citizen Litigation Group who specializes in online privacy and free speech issues. "I don't think there is any way for the government to come out of this looking good," Levy said. There is no indication that the White House was aware of the summons, which was signed by a Florida-based supervisor who works in an office that investigates employee corruption, misconduct and mismanagement. The supervisor could not be reached for comment. —Reuters

SMART CITIES: TECHNOLOGY MEETS NEXT GEN INFRASTRUCTURE

By Dr. Raymond Khoury

Technology is significantly changing the way people perceive and experience life and digitization presents a powerful opportunity to enhance how they live within cities. As a result, governments and city officials are building 'Smart Cities' by leveraging the latest technologies supported by next-generation scalable and adaptable city-wide infrastructure to better engage with their constituents or citizens. Success in Smart City development, however, demands a phased, holistic, citizen-centric approach.

By facilitating the creation of Smart Cities, which use advanced infrastructure and digital solutions to deliver services, technology can help policymakers address the economic, social, and environmental challenges of urbanization. Smart Cities make digital technology, networks, and apps a central part of operations and constituent interactions. Such advanced technology-enabled projects are moving ahead around the world. In the Netherlands, for example, data analysis is helping to predict floods, avoid water shortages, and reduce water management costs by 15 percent.

In India, real-time adaptive traffic control systems are resulting in a 12percent reduction in average traffic time. In South Korea, smart technologies are enabling waste management, remote healthcare, and interactive learning as an initial slate of services. In the UAE, the Dubai Smart City Vision aims to create a city where all its resources are optimized for maximum efficiency, and everyday services are integrated seamlessly into daily life, thus creating a more connected, sustainable life and business experience possible for all.

Dubai Plan 2021 prioritizes innovation as the key driver of the economy across all sectors. It further highlights "The Place" as one of six core themes with the aim to achieve a smart and sustainability city. Making this a reality and allowing for the full transformation to this state, however, requires advancement and realization of certain essential elements. Booz Allen Hamilton has identified these as - an engaged citizen; smart services; next generation infrastructure; and digital foundational enablers.

An engaged citizen

Smart Cities engage citizens or residents through multiple channels: TVs, smartphones, tablets, wearable devices, and future technologies and access points yet to be imagined and developed. For these channels to be effective, people need to be aware of services and comfortable using the technology. An Engaged Citizen is necessary for "mass" usage and uptake of Smart Services and for ensuring engagement with a smart city.

Smart services

Smart services transcend services provided by city governments to encompass services also provided by the private sector. Not all smart services, however, are created equal, and each will have different degrees of "Smartness". The lowest degree of service smartness is the "Connected Service" whereby Services are connected to the Internet and available to end-users anytime, anyplace.

Taking it up a notch, the "Integrated Service" is integrated with various systems and relayed to a centralized command and control center, enabling seamless communication and flow of information (e.g. a centralized disaster notification system that integrates emergency communications and responses across safety/security agencies).

The next degree of smartness is the "Personalized Service" which is customized and delivered to citizens, residents, or tourists based on their characteristics, historical preferences, location, consumption habits, etc. The ultimate smart service is the "Predictive Service" which is proactively delivered to citizens, residents, or tourists by forecasting their needs based on hard field intelligence (predictive analytics) allowing for preemption, preparedness and/or precaution.

Next gen infrastructure

In order to instill a superior quality of life to a city's citizens, residents, or tourists, the city's next generation infrastructure should be based on open data and predictive data analytics. Smart analytics platforms covering big data analytics, predictive and decision analytics are critical for superior customer experience in a city.

Of critical importance as well is a smart infrastructure covering sensor and M2M networks around the city, ultra high- speed connectivity, and convergence platforms to ensure that Smart Services are seamlessly accessed and properly integrated to deliver a holistic service, irrespective of which public or private sector entity is providing the service.

Digital foundational enablers

The foundation of a comprehensive smart city digital ecosystem hinges upon eight key enablers, covering: governance, open government and analytics, innovation and entrepreneurship, e-literacy, cyber security, policies and standards, private-public partnerships, strategic communications and usage incentive mechanisms. These enablers ensure sustainability and advancement of smart city services and offerings.

Using the above stated essential elements as a reference, it is clear that GCC countries are in the lead towards the

Dr. Raymond Khoury, Executive Vice President, Booz Allen Hamilton, MENA

transformation towards smart cities, especially with the UAE (Emirates of Dubai and Abu Dhabi), KSA (Riyadh) and Qatar (Doha) advancing their agendas in recent time. However, there is still one area where the MENA region is lagging behind - and this is in data science capabilities.

So far, this is still scarce and depends to a large extent on importing know-how from either Europe or the US. More is needed to nurture, groom and grow data scientists in the region. Most organizations are still unclear about the value data analytics can bring, and are reluctant to start engaging in any sort of analytics program.

To overcome this challenge, it is essential for organizations, be they in the public or private sector, to work towards developing and nurturing a truly data-driven culture. To capitalize on the power of citizen or customer analytics, organizations need to place innovation, analytics and citizen- or customer-centricity at the core of their corporate culture. A stronger and more effective digital economy will be a cornerstone of regional economic growth and development for the future.

In a region where approximately 60 per cent of the population is under the age of 25 and increasingly tech savvy, we already have an enormous number of people who have a powerful online and digital mindset. And in a region where oil-dominated economies are now actively diversifying, embracing the digital age will prove a powerful driver of growth - a driver that can only become more effective with the right regional capabilities developed, particularly in the data analytics domain.

AMAZON PRIME PICKS OFF NFL THURSDAY NIGHT FROM TWITTER

NEW YORK: Amazon's new deal gives Prime Time football a whole new meaning. The e-commerce powerhouse will stream NFL Thursday Night games this season via its Amazon Prime video service, replacing Twitter. The live-streams of the games will be available to the estimated 65 million members of Amazon Prime, which costs $99 per year and also includes other perks like free videos, books and shipping. That means that technically, the games won't be free to stream, but they will still be carried by broadcast networks CBS or NBC, as well as simultaneously on the NFL Network.

A person with knowledge of the agreement told The Associated Press on Wednesday that it's a one-year deal worth close to $50 million. The person spoke on condition of anonymity because the deal has not been announced publicly. That would be about five times what Twitter paid for the right to stream the games last year. Twitter's reach last year for the 10 games was an average of about 2.7 million users. Amazon has been building out its Prime Video streaming service to compete with rival services like Netflix or Hulu, neither of which stream sports live. —AP